The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People
Editor: **Marjukka Grover**

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In this issue

EDITORIAL

Imagine how you would feel to find yourself in a foreign country where the language and communicative rules were almost the opposite to your own. You could not even guess a single word and your behaviour might draw attention as being 'odd'.

This, of course, is what happens to many people around the world, who have to move for work or study. But how much more difficult it is for children to learn a language and adapt to a new culture, which differs greatly from their own. In this issue Asako Yamada-Yamamoto explains the difficulties faced by Japanese children temporarily studying in British classrooms. The article also gives insight into the problems faced by the parents as they try to maintain the children's Japanese, vital for their return, whilst also encouraging them to become fluent in English.

Adoption and bilingualism is an area which, until now, has not been discussed in the pages of the **Bilingual Family Newsletter**. As there are less children for adoption in Western countries, many families start looking at the possibilities of adopting from abroad. How can the parents overcome any language barriers? Should they try to maintain the child's native language and culture? Is there the possibility of bilingualism in a family where parents do not speak the child's native language? In this issue's Question and Answer section Colin Baker, the author of **A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism**, looks into questions faced by adoptive parents.

It has been nice to receive comments on recently published articles. Please keep on sending your letters, they are very much appreciated.

Marjukka Grover

WHERE EAST MEETS WEST
Language development of Japanese children in Britain

Asako Yamada-Yamamoto
(山　本　麻　子)
yama moto asa ko

Inward investment by Japanese commercial, financial and industrial organisations in the UK has resulted in a substantial influx of Japanese nationals, who are registered as long-term residents in Britain (approximately 51,000, of which more than 20% are children).

When discussing language development by Japanese children in the UK, three factors need to be taken into consideration:

1. Distinct **typological differences** between English and Japanese.
2. A strong social and educational pressure **to maintain Japanese**.
3. Striking differences between English and Japanese **attitudes to language**.

Drastic linguistic differences between English and Japanese

It is by now well known to linguists that English and Japanese are typologically very different from each other. For example, word order is almost the opposite, which is typically illustrated by the *mirror-image phenomenon.* This phenomenon is commonly noted by persons familiar with both English and Japanese.

Japanese children in a British classroom hard at work

'A basic strategy for rough translations of descriptive prose from Japanese to English is first to identify the subject of the sentence, then to move to the end of each clause and work up' (Smith, 1978).

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Tokyo eki -kara densha -de ichijikan kurai nishi-e itta tokoro-ni Kamakura toiu machi -ga arimasu.
Tokyo station from tram by one hour about west towards go place at Kamakura called town (subject-marker) exists.
'There is a town called Kamakura at a place (you can reach) going towards the west about one hour by tram from Tokyo Station.'
(after Hibett and Itasaka, 1967)

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Apart from the vast differences in phonetics and semantics (meaning of the language) imagine how much confusion and loss of confidence would occur to Japanese children starting to learn English syntax (word order and grammar). In my book (Yamada-Yamamoto, 1995) I describe in detail the struggle and time it takes for a young Japanese child to move from Japanese influenced syntax to a more English syntax.

Strong social and educational pressure to maintain Japanese

Parents of Japanese children temporarily living in the UK (usually for 3 - 5 years) are keen for their children to make as much progress in English as possible; at the same time they are equally anxious that the temporary posting to Britain does not adversely affect the children's maintenance and development of Japanese. Such deterioration of Japanese could result in educational and social disadvantage on the family' s return to Japan.

"Japanese culture emphasises listening to each other, rather than talking to each other, for the purpose of mutual understanding. "

Their strategies for trying to solve this dilemma vary. Some families concentrate on the learning of Japanese and send their children to Japanese schools in the UK. The majority, however, try to achieve a compromise between encouraging the learning of English and facilitating the development of Japanese. For this purpose most of the children who attend local English-speaking schools also attend Japanese Saturday Schools. The language and its accompanying educational question is one that causes considerable anxiety for Japanese parents. Many parents are in a dilemma as to how they set the language-learning policy for their children during their stay in the UK.

Every child has only about 15 waking hours a day available and so those who aim at developing the two languages simultaneously have theoretically only half the time available for each language, compared to those who concentrate on one language only. The average time spent by school-aged Japanese children who attend both a local school and the Japanese Saturday School is approximately the same for each language (based on the assumption that Japanese is used at home before and after school and all day at weekends). In order to obtain the maximum effect from the limited exposure to each language, quality and quantity of both input and interaction are very important. Formal education in each language is crucial in widening the scope of the actual use of that language and for literacy development, in terms of its vocabulary, style and construction.

Striking differences between English and Japanese attitudes to language

Culture, and thus language, transmit specific values assigned to a particular phenomenon. Values assigned to one incident and its interpretation in one culture are not necessarily the same as those in another culture. In the late 1970's researchers in Japan started to take an interest in Japan's young *returnees,* who had spent several years abroad and had learned local languages and cultures. They observed the process in which these children readjusted themselves to Japanese society. This readjustment sometimes caused confusion and conflict to both the returnees and society.

In Britain, Japanese children's behaviour, which is different from the behaviour of British children, recently started to attract people' s attention. Japanese children are often seen to be reluctant to talk in class. British teachers find such reluctance problematic, but are also frustrated by the parents' apparent lack of concern. The researchers interpret such a conflict as differences between British and Japanese educational philosophies. In the British philosophy, children learn by talking about their work, and by listening to other children talking in the classroom. British educationalists emphasise the importance of classroom talk.

'Talking among themselves gives children the chance to explore concepts, to try out theories,... ' (Edwards, 1995).

In Japanese educational philosophy, on the other hand, children learn by listening to the teacher.

In Japan, a teacher (*sensei*) is respected not only as someone who has a wide knowledge of an academic subject, but also as someone who is a model of morality. Pupils are expected to **listen** attentively to the teacher, who is expected, in turn, to look after the pupils, as shown in the following extracts:

'A teacher is a figure of authority, and is therefore always right. This renders difficult an approach to teaching which requires the student to be an individual. This is felt more particularly in a discussion where students would not argue with the teacher' Teaching Japanese Students' (source unknown).

'Many Japanese students express surprise when they see Australian students raising their hands before the lecturer has finished speaking. For them, such behaviour appears to be infringing on the lecturer's time. Consequently, Japanese students tend to ask questions privately after the end of class.' (Koyama, 1992)

A teacher-pupil relationship, or a senior-junior relationship, exists everywhere in Japanese society. At home, children are encouraged to listen to their parents who are more experienced in life and thus should know more. At school younger children are expected to listen and follow older children, who should set examples for them. As a consequence of such an approach to education and culture, talking or exchanging opinions in public, such as in classroom situations, are not encouraged. Interactive lessons are often perceived by Japanese students as 'playing'.

Japanese culture emphasises **'listening to each other'**, rather than 'talking to each other', for the purpose of mutual understanding. A short period of silence or pause (*ma* 間, in Japanese, meaning *between*) frequently occurs in between utterances or in between turn-taking, on the assumption that such a pause is necessary for the listeners to digest the content of the speech. Consequently, a certain degree of silence is allowed in Japanese discourse, and silence does not have to be avoided in discussions or meetings. Talking continuously tends to be associated with adjectives such as 'selfish', 'aggressive', 'distrustful' and 'superficial'.

' Japanese abounds in what are, to European ears, 'unfinished' utterances, and the Japanese have an amazing ability to hear the unspoken word and to sense changes in atmosphere and human relationships' (Thompson, 1995).

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Leena Huss from Sweden

Leena and Göran with Mikael (23), Mattias (20), Markus (15) and Pami, the bilingual Shetland Sheepdog, who understands Finnish and Swedish.

Which country do you come from? I come from Finland and, as a family, we lived there between the years 1980-1983.

What do you like most about your new country? The Swedes are very friendly and helpful; they welcome you with open arms, and you get called by your Christian name.

What do you dislike most about your new country? The fact that the locals have such difficulty in understanding why anyone would want to speak some other language while in Sweden.

How do Swedish people treat foreigners? Generally very well, although there is a small minority of people who are racists and dislike anything foreign. Out of a total population of 9 million, there are some 1.5 million immigrants, so the locals should be accustomed to seeing people of differing race and colour. Since the economic situation in Sweden has become more unstable, the position of these foreigners has grown worse in the labour market, and within society as a whole. There is an increased opposition to mother-tongue teaching and bilingualism, resulting in a kind of unofficial 'Swedish Only'movement.

How do you feel about being a foreigner in Sweden? I do not feel a foreigner as I know that there have always been Finns in Sweden, in the north of the country as well as the south. Not all Swedes know about this, though; history teaching in Swedish schools can be very lacking.

How does everyday life differ from life in your home country? It is not that different. The nature is the same, as are the seasons; people ski, skate and visit their summer cabins. Many foods, including meatballs and cabbage rolls, are the same; one eats pea soup on Thursdays and ham followed by rice pudding at Christmas.

What about your children's schooling? All three of our sons have attended Swedish schools (apart from Mika, who additionally had two years at a local school in Finland) with extra home-language instruction in Finnish amounting to between twenty minutes and two hours per week.

(translated from Finnish to English by Kirsti Gibbs)

How do your children feel about their identity? They have a fairly relaxed view on it. There have been many prejudices over the years between Finland and Sweden and, consequently, the boys have had to act as diplomats on many occasions; in Sweden they have found themselves speaking in support of Finland, and vice versa. They themselves acknowledge the fact that there are positive and negative aspects to each country, and when asked which country they belong to, they answer: 'both'!

What is your children's preferred language? Swedish is the easier language, because they have heard it more, and use it at school. On the other hand, they have always spoken Finnish to me and their language is fluent, although with a somewhat smaller vocabulary. They also read and write Finnish. They all think that I was absolutely right to teach them Finnish – they would not want it any other way. Which language they will end up speaking to their children is another matter!

What effect has being bilingual and bicultural had on your children? It has given them an interest in different languages and cultures. At school my sons have chosen to study all languages available and find them easy. My eldest has studied Chinese and is at present in China. In his letter to me last week he wrote that he will next take up Tibetan! My middle son is studying journalism and likes to write. He may well find his Finnish useful one day.

How has being bilingual and bicultural affected your family life? It has given us a new dimension, which we would not like to be without. We like to joke in two languages, compare our native countries, and travel between the two. I feel at home in Sweden because I have been allowed to remain 'me', speak my own language and introduce the children to my own background. The fact that my husband has always supported our bilingualism has brought us closer together. I could not imagine being married to someone, who might not be interested in my cultural background, or who might wish for our children to be monolingual. It is precisely because of my husband that it was so easy for me to settle in Sweden and to begin to love this, my second homeland.

ImF

Readers of the **Bilingual Family Newsletter** already have access to an important and helpful international source of information for multilingual families. Those raising children in Germany might be interested to learn of the existence of an organization, **Interessengemeinschaft mehrsprachiger Familien e.V.** (Interest Group for Multilingual Families').

We started networking with multilingual families in the Rhine-Main (Frankfurt) area three years ago by organising lectures and information evenings. It was at the first 'event' we organized that a questionnaire was distributed asking attendees about their interest in an organisation for bilingual families.

In May 1996 we braved the wellknown German bureaucracy, officially founding the interest group and becoming the proud 'owners' of two new letters - the e.V. *(eingetragener Verein*, registered organization) which we may now legally add to our official name. We've even been granted 'charitable organisation' status, which means that donations and membership dues (DM 25 per year) are tax-deductible.

*"As long as multilingualism is seen by society as something exotic, abnormal or even dangerous, there will be a need for organisations like the **Interessengemeinschaft mehrsprachiger Familien**".*

Who are 'we'? A small team of parents of bilingual children, all of whom are fascinated by multilingualism and happy when we can help out other bilingual families. As long as multilingualism is seen by society as something exotic, abnormal or even dangerous, there will be a need for organisations like the **Interessengemeinschaft mehrsprachiger Familien.**

What do we want the **ImF** to be? We want to function as a source of information for multilingual families for the whole of Germany. That means we'll actively maintain an *info-bank* of books, articles, sources for materials in other languages etc., which can be accessed by interested families. We also see ourselves as a *bulletin board* for families looking for other families to organise playgroups, language instruction or other activities

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for their bilingual offspring. Our newsletter, **The Polyglot** will service this function.

The **ImF** should be a meeting point for multilingual families. Up-to-date information can be a big help to parents of multilingual children who are often unsure if they are really doing the right thing, and so we'll be inviting local members (as well as the general public) to formal talks and informal discussions on bilingual issues.

We are gradually extending our network to other parts of Germany and would therefore be particularly pleased to hear from any **BFN** readers who can pass on information to help us broaden our database (existing playgroups and programs for multilingual families in Germany, sources for other language materials for children, etc.) or are searching for like-minded families and support in raising their children bilingually in Germany.

We have invested our hearts in this project because of our conviction that families who have the chance to give their children the gift of multilingualism shouldn't throw it away simply for lack of support or accurate information.

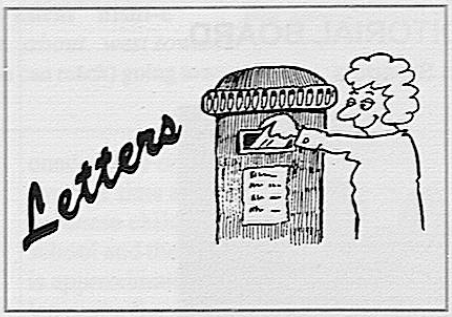
The **BFN** readers who are interested in finding out more about the **ImF** can receive a copy of **Polyglot** (in either German or English) by sending a request (along with DM4 in stamps to cover our costs) to

Interessengemeinschaft mehrsprachiger Familien e.V.,
Benzstr. 17,
64546 Mörfelden (Germany)
or a fax to 06105/277827.

Janet Hagen, Petra Thorn and Marina Zvetina

The readers of this book have to use French and English to understand the story

Pbk ISBN 1-85658-00-8 Price £4.99 (US$9.95)



How many is too many?

We have a three-and-a-half year old daughter, Aisling, and a seven month old baby, Ciara. The linguistic environment of Aisling has, perhaps, been unusually complex. My wife is a French-speaking Swiss and, naturally, speaks French to the children. I am Irish and speak Irish to them, and we both strongly believe in the 'one person - one language' principle. We intended that they should learn English from the environment in Ireland, and we also wished them to learn Esperanto, because in my experience it considerably aids both logical thinking and the acquisition of other languages.

Because of my work in the Irish diplomatic service, however, we were transferred to Poland in May 1994, when Aisling was fifteen months old. This meant frequent exposure to Polish, as we have to use Polish babysitters when we go out, which is usually a few times per week. For fifteen months we had a resident Polish au pair, whose second language is German. We also have regular contact with Esperanto-speaking Poles, from whom my wife has picked up fluent Esperanto, as she doesn't speak Polish (I have had to learn Polish for work-related reasons).

"I have always been in favour of multilingualism, but with hindsight I feel that Aisling may have had too much language input, as her linguistic development has slowed."

For one year we sent Aisling to an English-speaking Montessori kindergarten, two mornings per week. She was thus in regular contact with six languages – French, Irish, Polish, German, Esperanto and English, and in daily contact with the first three. I have always been in favour of multilingualism, but with hindsight I feel that Aisling may have had too much language input, as her linguistic development has slowed. She learned a large vocabulary, but was unable to use it to effect as it was composed of elements from so many languages. We also noted that, particularly when German was spoken, Aisling ceased making any effort to listen and retreated into a world of her own.

We have now reduced the children's linguistic input. The resident Polish au pair has been replaced, thus eliminating German, and Aisling now attends a French-language kindergarten daily. Since September she has made rapid progress in French, and to a lesser extent in Irish. She has a reasonably passive knowledge of Polish and Esperanto, but does not use them unless prompted. She has become clearly French-dominant, and uses this language to her little sister. When we return to Ireland in summer 1998 we intend to send both girls to an Irish-medium school, and accept that the Polish element will probably disappear and be replaced by English. We intend to make every effort to ensure that she learns Esperanto, as this is not difficult for a French-speaker, and we feel that the advantages far outweigh the little extra effort involved.

Suzanne and Seán ó Riain, Poland

Comments on the 'Language Disorder' article

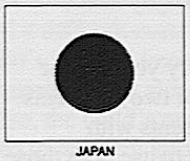
My wife and I have been subscribers to **BFN** for several years and have found it a valuable source of encouragement, advice and information in our attempts to bring up our daughter, Marina, with two languages, English and Serbian. As she is also attending a Dutch school and has many Dutch friends, she is effectively learning three languages. We have found it a very rewarding family experience.

Apart from the benefits to family life, we believe that a bilingual upbringing, or any habitual exposure to a variety of languages, disposes the child to be more open to 'other' cultures and more able to live with and negotiate inter-cultural situations. Such situations are becoming more, not less, frequent in our lives.

I found the piece by Li Wei Niklas Miller and Barbara Dodd in (Vol. 14: 1, 97) useful as both a parent and teacher. As you hint in your editorial of that edition, the confidence of many parents and children in bilingualism is often tested by visits to speech therapists. It is important that parents find out the extent of a therapist's knowledge of issues in bilingual language development before trusting a professional verdict. It seems that in certain quarters institutional views of language development are still based, in highly judgemental ways, on

How I feel like to be Bilingual

I am bilingual; I know English and Japanese. I know two languages because my father is American and my mother is Japanese. When I know two languages the good point is that I can make more friends. I can make friends, both American and Japanese. Even if I want to make friends that are French, English can be understood in most places, so I think I am really lucky. If there are good points, there are bad points. But I think I'm luckier than unlucky. The bad point is that some of my Japanese friends ask me to speak English sometimes. I don't like to speak English in front of my friends too much because it's like boasting. But when my friends ask me about English homework I don't mind telling them. As a matter of fact, I like telling my friends about English homework. I feel good when I think I could help them in some way.



JAPAN

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

What I feel like to be bilingual is lucky, special, and I think I have the most friends in the world. Maybe that's not true, but I like thinking that way. I like thinking I'm the most lucky girl in the world. Sometimes I'd like to talk to people all around the world and have a trillion friends. I'd like to be multilingual, like my father. I was taking French lessons, but my teacher went away to Europe. But I still have the notebooks, so I can study French all over again. That way I can be trilingual, Japanese/English/ French. That will be fun.

Agnes Petrucione (age 11 years)

(First published in *Bilingual Japan*, Vol.6:1, 97. Used by the kind permissiion of the editor)

monolingual assumptions and practices. In particular, education systems seem to lack sensitivity to the realities of multilingual society.

We hope that bilingual families around the world can continue to challenge such assumptions and prove them wrong. Any therapist who argues for the 'banning' of a language from the home does not deserve to be taken seriously in professional terms. We would urge Paola Crépin-Lanzarotto – whose story touched us, as I'm sure it did many parents – to persist in speaking Italian with her son and treat the views of her speech therapist on bilingualism with caution.

Rob Oliver, Oegstgeest, Netherlands

More on identity, please!

I was interested to read your son's article about *The Trials and Tribulations of a Bilingual Teenager* (Vol.14:2, 97), and in your comment that you hadn't been aware of his feelings about his identity as a teenager. I wonder how other parents and children think on this subject? It might be interesting to open up the subject in the Newsletter.

I was also interested to see that your son feels more at home in Finland. As a student I spent six months in Germany, and I too felt very much at home there. Maybe it's because, after growing up in a country where you stand out because you're Finnish or German or whatever, it's such a relief to find youself in a country where Finnish or German or whatever is just the normal thing to be.

Have you ever had any contributions from children who have grown up in a situation of 'artificial' bilingualism?

Alathea Anderssohn, Morocco

Bilingualism after divorce

I would like to add my comments on the issue of maintaining bilingualism after divorce (Vol.12:1, 95).

My son, Yakov, is six and daughter, Sarah, is four. Their father is German and has consistently used German with them since birth. The children speak English with me and everyone else here in America. Their passive German is excellent, and their active German is good, though it shows a strong influence of English word order and they lack some vocabulary.

Their father and I divorced a year ago. The children live with me during the school year (about nine and a half months) and with their father during the summer and holidays. We have maintained a cordial relationship which helps the children adjust in all ways. We both felt strongly about continuing their bilingualism, despite the long absences from their German-speaking father.

Here is what we have done: their father phones three times a week, and we correspond by letter and e-mail at least once a week. This forces the children to use German actively. As they will not speak German to me freely, but I have made a deal with them! We have *Deutschstunde* (German hour) when we watch a German video or read German books (three to four times a week) and then they speak German. In addition, I hire a native German-speaking babysitter to spend two hours a week playing with them.

It has been only one year, but so far their bilingualism has continued. and they are able to speak German with their father, with occasional prompting for vocabulary.

Shoshanah Dietz, Loma Linda, USA

WHERE EAST..*Cont. from page two*

Whereas is English-speaking countries silence tends to be associated with 'bad mood', 'sullen', 'confusion'and 'anger', and thus speakers try to avoid creating silence. People in English-speaking countries therefore seem to find silence in Japanese students' discourse irritating. Given these striking differences between English and Japanese attitudes to language, it takes a Japanese child a good while to tune in.

Summary

I have discussed three factors which have to be taken into account when dealing with Japanese children in British classrooms. These factors might be worth considering for British children in Japanese classrooms. Cases of Japanese children temporarily resident in Britain are considered to be rather extreme cases for the following reason:

1. English and Japanese are located at the two extremes of language typology.
2. Equal priority given to English and Japanese is causing a dilemma for Japanese children.
3. English and Japanese attitudes to language are almost opposite to each other.

Other cases of bilingualism with different language combinations and with different conditions may be located somewhere between these extremes. The cases of Japanese children in the UK will therefore surely give insight into various issues of other cases of bilingual families.

Asako Yamada-Yamamoto is a researcher at the Department of Linguistics, University of Reading.

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Adoption and Bilingualism

With the recent increase in adoption from foreign countries, issues of language are particularly relevant. I've not been able to find much written on this topic, even in the adoption literature.
My husband is German, I am American. I can speak German fluently (though, of course, not like a native German). My husband's English is excellent. We've lived in Germany and now live in the United States. We are in the process of adopting a child from Hungary. It is possible that our child could be as old as two-and -a half years. This would mean that he/she would have had considerable contact with Hungarian, a language neither my husband nor I speak. We would like our child to speak and understand both German and English, but are unsure as to how to begin with the child. I've spoken with other parents of Hungarian children and they say that the children learn English very quickly. We're not sure how to begin with German or English.

Geraldine Reitz, New York, USA

We are teachers in Finland and monolingual in Finnish but have learned Swedish and English as foreign languages in School. We have an eight-year-old son, Hari, whom we adopted when he was only three days old, and are now in process of adopting seven-year-old Katerina from Russia. Neither of us can speak Russian but are going to evening classes to learn some. We would like her to become bilingual in Finnish and Russian but what are the prospects? We assume she will have no problems in learning Finnish fluently but should we try to keep her Russian alive, and how can we help her?

Ilkka & Pirkko-Liisa Nurmi, Seinäjoki, Finland

This issue is one that certanly needs addressing.

If an adopted child is very young, (for example, up to the age of two), it seems quite appropriate for parents with different first languages to use both those languages with the child.

However, what needs to be addressed with very young children is whether their *native* or *heritage* language should be also introduced by whatever means are available. Such an introduction of the child's heritage language (or not) will be based on parental values, such as whether they want the child to become, for example, an American or have dual

"An acknowledgement of the child's first language is an acknowledgement of the child itself, his or her identity and origins."

American-Hungarian identity. A decision will also be made on whether, realistically, language support in Hungarian could be offered.

It seems important for every child to reach a high level of self-esteem, to be secure in their self-identity and this, for some parents, will mean celebrating the child's ethnic roots as well as their adopted country. As time goes on, the child will itself probably express a preference for retaining or rejecting dual (multiple) identity. For some parents, such continuity of identity from birth is a cultural rather than a linguistic matter. They may celebrate the heritage culture of the adopted child without linguistic input in the heritage language.

If the child's *native* language is encouraged by the parents, it may not become a fully functioning language, as often there are not the people, or the community contacts, to use that language frequently. Nevertheless, a child who has passive understanding of a heritage language may in the future be able to activate that if he or she so chooses.

To summarise. Before language considerations, there are usually more basic considerations in adoption, such as the child feeling a sense of belonging to the adopted family, feeling love and support from parents and others, and growing up to have a strong sense of self-identity and high self-esteem, a belief in oneself and a sense of success in friendships and work. Strategies to retain the child's heritage language may certainly help those basic and fundamental aims. Perhaps on less frequent occasions, there will be times when hard enforcement of the child's heritage language, and an unwanted exaggeration of the child's origins, may work against the child's own wishes. Therefore, it is important for parents to keep an open mind, to be sympathetic and sensitive to the child's development and preferences .

When adopting an older child (above the age of three) his/her first language is already well-established. In the case of the Finnish parents adopting a seven-year-old Russian girl the question becomes: should the parents effect a rapid but smooth transition from Russian to Finnish? Or should they attempt to maintain the child's first language, Russian?

Again, the important starting point is not language, but engendering a sense of family belonging, support, affection and love. Children are both resilient and fragile; they are optimistic and very adaptable while being sensitive and tender creatures. However, supporting the child's first language is important for several reasons.

When an older child is adopted, a child's self-esteem and self-concept will be usually enhanced when the parents explicitly show they value the child's home language. An acknowledgement of

Continued on page seven

BILINGUAL COUPLES

As a bilingual couple, which language do you usually speak together? Under which circumstances do you use another language? Has your language use changed in the course of your relationship? How well do you speak each other's languages? How did you learn it? Have you created something like a 'private language' for yourselves?
If you are a **German/English** bilingual couple and are interested in taking part in a research project, please get in touch with

Contact details removed

The more material we have, the better the Newsletter will be. Please continue to send us letters and articles which you think might interest our readers.

Continued from page six

the child's first language is an acknowledgement of the child itself, his or her identity and origins. In the case of Katerina, if parents explicitly value Russian, then they are valuing the child, showing their love and affection. To ignore Katerina's first language, Russian, may send an implicit message that her origins, first language and culture, and the early years of her life is unimportant, irrelevant and valueless.

The question is how do parents, who do not speak their adopted child's first language, come to value that language, and support bilingualism or trilingualism in the child? There is no easy or guaranteed method, but here are some ideas worth considering:

1. Before the adopted child arrives, the parents could make an attempt to learn some of the child's first language. Using a few phrases with the child in that child's first language sends a message beyond the words themselves. The message is that 'we value your language, your culture, and therefore you'. While the parent is not going to be a very good language model for the child, simple communication in the child's first language is about support and starting a loving relationship.

2. At the same time, the adopted child needs to learn the language of the country, particularly the language of formal education. Parents will often be delighted at how quickly young children pick up a new language at home, particularly if there are lots of gestures, actions and all kinds of non-verbal communication to accompany the early stages of learning a second language.

It is even better if parents reward and encourage bilingualism and not just the learning of the second language. For example, the parents may comment not only on increasing facility in Finnish, but congratulate the child on being able to speak Finnish **and** Russian. Taking pride in one's bilingualism can be an important component in developing and retaining high self-esteem.

3. Parents should try to keep the first language of the child going if at all possible. This will develop a securer self-identity and seek to avoid a demolition of the child's initial identity. Many children and adults find multiple identities an asset and a strength. However, the adopting parents may often find it difficult even to preserve the child's level of heritage language competence, let alone effect progress. (Also, the child's own wishes and wants need to be taken into account).

Parents should consider buying books, cassettes, videos, satellite television and in the future, the use of the Internet, to give the child the opportunity to use, albeit passively, his or her first language. Such media not only give the child a limited form of language practice, but will also symbolize that their *native* language is accepted and valued by the parents. For cultural and linguistic continuity it is a good strategy to find a person, family or group of people who speak that child's native language. This is more beneficial than media in many cases as it provides the child with a chance of active speaking.

4. An important choice by parents is of a sympathetic school for their adopted child. The choice of a language-sensitive school will affect the child's achievement and progress in school, and thereby their self-esteem.

To conclude. By giving an adopted child the chance of retaining their language, of a bicultural or multicultural heritage, is to give freedom and power to the child. The parent who insists on ignoring and burying the child's linguistic and cultural origins can so easily be restricting and constraining the child.

Colin Baker, Professor of Education, University of Wales, Bangor

Help needed!

The article about language disorders (Vol. 14: 1, 97) came at a very opportune moment. We have discovered that our son Phil (aged 5 years) not only has hearing problems but also sensory perception problems. Both are minor thankfully. However, now I need some help/advice from bilingual parents who have faced similar problems.
After having fluid drained from his ears and tubes put in, Phil can hear everything. His younger brother Riky (aged 4 years) had the same operation and is now talking everyone's ears off. Phil, however, is not. Diagnostic tests showed that Phil has problems with his short term language processing. More tests are coming up and speech therapy has been prescribed. Furthermore, he also has visual problems (prenatal cataracts, cross-eyed and a few more problems), which do not affect his language ability but do contribute to his sensory perception problems.
He attends normal German day care (Kindergarten) and has no problems as he is such an amicable child. Any advice would be appreciated. Our family speaks English and German.

L. Lynette Kirschner

Contact details removed

The editor, with the help of the International Editorial Board, is happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism/-culturalism. We reserve the right to edit any letters published. All contributions to the Newsletter should be sent to:

Editor: Marjukka Grover
at Multilingual Matters

If you want to get in touch with any member of the board please send your letter to c/o Multilingual Matters and we will forward it to him/her.

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If you wish your name and address to be included in the contact section, please send us the following information:
Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the types of families with whom you would like to get in touch.

The following people would like to get in touch with either same combination language families or other bilingual families in their area.

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